



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Public Service Commission**

Our reference: LEX 658

Anonymous

By email: foi-request-8940-209fflce.wo22g@aleeas.com

Dear Applicant

**Freedom of Information Internal Review Request – LEX 658**

1. I am writing about your request for internal review, dated 28 September 2023, regarding a decision made by the Australian Public Service Commission (**Commission**) under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act)*.

**Background**

2. On 29 August 2023, you requested the following documents from the Commission under the FOI Act:

*“The relevant search period for the requested documents is from 10 December 2020 to 28 August 2023. Under the FOI Act 1982 (Cth), I request access to any and all documents that:*

- a) were sent; or*
  - b) were received; or*
  - c) were prepared; or*
  - d) were in any way handled,*
- by each of:*

- i) Peter Woolcott; ii) Charmaine Sims; iii) Rina Bruinsma; iv) Patrick Hetherington; v) Grant Lovelock; vi) Giorgina Strangio; vii) Marco Spaccavento; viii) Kylie Barber; ix) Vidya Vasudevan; x) Gareth Appleton; xi) Peter Riordan; xii) Helen Wilson; xiii) Emma Rees; xiv) Clare McLean; xv) Kate McMullan; xvi) Jim McGrath; xvii) James O’Reilly; xviii) any person to have held the position, whether substantively or in an acting capacity, of Assistant Commissioner, Integrity, Performance and Employment since 10 December 2020;*
  - xix) any person to have held the position, whether substantively or in an acting capacity, of Director, Integrity (or a cognate, or substantively similar, position in the APSC) since 10 December 2020;*
  - xx) Shelley Xu; xxi) Mitchell Little,*
- that:*
- V) advert to; or*
  - X) address; or*
  - Y) touch upon the subject of; or*
  - Z) relate to,*



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*the inadequacy of Kate McMullan’s public interest disclosure investigation, or the inadequacy of the report of Kate McMullan’s public interest disclosure investigation, into allegations of misconduct in respect of the recruitment of registrars in the Federal Court of Australia Statutory Agency.”*

3. On 27 September 2023, the FOI decision maker, Melanie McIntyre made a decision to refuse access to documents on grounds that all reasonable steps have been taken to find documents within scope of the request, and that no such documents meeting the description requested can be found or exist.
4. On 28 September 2023, you sought an internal review of Ms McIntyre’s decision.

**Decision**

5. I am authorised under subsection 23(1) of the FOI Act to make FOI decisions.
6. I am satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to find documents within scope of your request, and that no such documents falling within scope were found or exist.
7. I therefore **affirm** Ms McIntyre’s earlier decision by refusing your request for access to documents under section 24A of the FOI Act.

**Reasons for decision**

8. Subsection 24A(1) of the FOI Act provides:

*(1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:*

- (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and*  
*(b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:*  
*(i) is in the agency or Minister’s possession but cannot be found; or*  
*(ii) does not exist.*

9. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (**OAIC**) has issued guidelines under section 93A of the FOI Act. At paragraphs 3.88 to 3.93 of these guidelines, the OAIC provides guidance as to the meaning of the term ‘all reasonable steps’ for the purposes of subsection 24A(1) of the FOI Act. In this case these steps included searches of document management systems and emails.

**Contacts**

10. If you require clarification on matters in this letter, please contact the Commission’s FOI Officer by email at [foi@apsc.gov.au](mailto:foi@apsc.gov.au).



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**Review rights**

11. You are entitled to seek review of this decision. Your review rights are set out at **Attachment A**.

Yours sincerely

*Amanda Harmer*

Ms Amanda Harmer  
Authorised FOI decision maker  
30 October 2023



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**ATTACHMENT A**

## **Rights of Review**

### **Asking for a full explanation of a Freedom of Information decision**

If you are dissatisfied with this decision, you may seek external review. Before you seek review of a Freedom of Information (FOI) decision, you may contact us to discuss your request and we will explain the decision to you.

### **Applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner**

If you do not agree with the internal review decision, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner to review the decision. You have 60 days to apply in writing for a review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) from the date you received this letter or any subsequent internal review decision.

#### **You can lodge your application:**

Online: [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au)  
Post: Australian Information Commissioner  
GPO Box 5218  
SYDNEY NSW 2001  
Email: [enquiries@oaic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@oaic.gov.au)

The OAIC encourage applicants to apply online. Where possible, to assist the OAIC you should include your contact information, a copy of the related FOI decision and provide details of your reasons for objecting to the decision.

## **Complaints to the Information Commissioner and Commonwealth Ombudsman**

### ***Information Commissioner***

You may complain to the Information Commissioner concerning action taken by an agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Information Commissioner must be made in writing. The Information Commissioner's contact details are:

Telephone: 1300 363 992  
Website: [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au)

### ***Commonwealth Ombudsman***

You may complain to the Ombudsman concerning action taken by an agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Ombudsman may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. The Ombudsman's contact details are:

Phone: 1300 362 072  
Website: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)



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Anonymous

By Email: [foi-request-8940-209ff1ce.wo22g@aleeas.com](mailto:foi-request-8940-209ff1ce.wo22g@aleeas.com)

Our Reference: LEX 627

**Freedom of Information request**

1. I am writing about your Freedom of Information (FOI) request under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) made **29 August 2023** for access to documents held by the Australian Public Service Commission (Commission).
2. The FOI Act and all other Commonwealth legislation referred to in this letter are publicly available from [www.legislation.gov.au](http://www.legislation.gov.au).

**Documents relevant to your request**

3. You requested access to the following:

*The relevant search period for the requested documents is from 10 December 2020 to 28 August 2023. Under the FOI Act 1982 (Cth), I request access to any and all documents that:*

- a) were sent; or b) were received; or c) were prepared; or d) were in any way handled,*

*by each of:*

*i) Peter Woolcott; ii) Charmaine Sims; iii) Rina Bruinsma; iv) Patrick Hetherington; v) Grant Lovelock; vi) Giorgina Strangio; vii) Marco Spaccavento; viii) Kylie Barber; ix) Vidya Vasudevan; x) Gareth Appleton; xi) Peter Riordan; xii) Helen Wilson; xiii) Emma Rees; xiv) Clare McLean; xv) Kate McMullan; xvi) Jim McGrath; xvii) James O'Reilly;*

*xviii) any person to have held the position, whether substantively or in an acting capacity, of Assistant Commissioner, Integrity, Performance and Employment since 10 December 2020;*

*xix) any person to have held the position, whether substantively or in an acting capacity, of Director, Integrity (or a cognate, or substantively similar, position in the APSC) since 10 December 2020;*

*xx) Shelley Xu; xxi) Mitchell Little, that:*

*V) advert to; or X) address; or Y) touch upon the subject of; or Z) relate to, the inadequacy of Kate McMullan's public interest disclosure investigation, or the inadequacy of the report of Kate McMullan's public interest disclosure investigation, into allegations of misconduct in respect of the recruitment of registrars in the Federal Court of Australia Statutory Agency.*

## **Decision on your FOI request**

4. I am authorised under subsection 23(1) of the FOI Act to make FOI decisions.
5. I am satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to find documents within scope of your request, and that no such documents meeting the description of what you have asked for can be found or exist.
6. As such, I refuse your request for access to documents pursuant to section 24A of the FOI Act.

## **Reasons for decision**

*Section 24A – documents that cannot be found or do not exist*

7. Subsection 24A(1) of the FOI Act provides:
  - (1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
    - (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
    - (b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
      - (i) is in the agency or Minister's possession but cannot be found; or
      - (ii) does not exist.
8. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) has issued guidelines pursuant to section 93A of the FOI Act. At paragraphs 3.88 to 3.93 of these guidelines, the OAIC provides guidance as to the meaning of the term 'all reasonable steps' in subsection 24A(1). In this case these steps included searches of document management systems and emails.

## **Contacts**

9. If you require clarification on matters in this letter please contact the Commission's FOI Officer by telephone on (02) 6202 3813 or by email at [foi@apsc.gov.au](mailto:foi@apsc.gov.au).

## **Review rights**

10. You are entitled to seek review of this decision. Your review rights are set out at **Attachment A**.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Melanie McIntyre', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Melanie McIntyre  
FOI decision maker  
27 September 2023

## **Rights of Review**

### **Asking for a full explanation of a Freedom of Information decision**

If you are dissatisfied with this decision, you may seek review. Before you seek review of a Freedom of Information (FOI) decision, you may contact us to discuss your request and we will explain the decision to you.

### **Seeking review of a Freedom of Information decision**

If you still believe a decision is incorrect, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) may give you the right to apply for a review of the decision. Under sections 54 and 54L of the FOI Act, you can apply for a review of an FOI decision by seeking:

1. an internal review by an different officer of the Australian Public Service Commission;  
and/or
2. external review by the Australian Information Commissioner.

There are no fees applied to either review option.

### **Applying for a review by an Internal Review Officer**

If you apply for internal review, a different decision maker to the departmental delegate who made the original decision will carry out the review. The Internal Review Officer will consider all aspects of the original decision and decide whether it should change. An application for internal review must be made in writing within 30 days of receiving this letter to:

**Email:** [foi@apsc.gov.au](mailto:foi@apsc.gov.au)

**Post:** The FOI Officer

Australian Public Service Commission

B Block, Treasury Building

GPO Box 3176

Parkes Place West

PARKES ACT 2600

You do not need to fill in a form. However, it is a good idea to set out any relevant submissions you would like the Internal Review Officer to further consider, and your reasons for disagreeing with the decision.

## **Applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner**

If you do not agree with the original FOI decision or the internal review decision, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner to review the decision. You have 60 days to apply in writing for a review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (the OAIC) from the date you received this letter or any subsequent internal review decision.

You can **lodge your application**:

Online: [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au)

Post: Australian Information Commissioner

GPO Box 5218

SYDNEY NSW 2001

Email: [enquiries@oaic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@oaic.gov.au)

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The Ombudsman's contact details are:

Phone: 1300 362 072

Website:  
[www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)